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RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 1573  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 HARARE 000206

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [ZI](#)  
SUBJECT: ZIMBABWE'S PRE-ELECTION CONDITIONS NOT FREE AND FAIR

REF: A. HARARE 00180

[1](#)B. HARARE 00162

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JAMES D. MCGEE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B & D)

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SUMMARY  
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[1](#)1. (SBU) Prospects for a free and fair election in Zimbabwe on March 29 are problematic. Voter rolls are suspect and have not been audited. Prospective voters, particularly in urban areas, have reported difficulties in registering. Voter education has been minimal. The number of polling places may be inadequate for urban voters, who favor the opposition. Media access has favored the ruling party. Violence and intimidation, while not as intense as in past elections, continues against the opposition, particularly the MDC. ZANU-PF, through the control of the state apparatus and resources, is attempting to buy support with massive handouts of money and goods such as farm equipment. On the positive side, the opposition has been given more space than in past elections to campaign, including the holding of rallies. And the Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network has been issued an invitation for over 11,000 observers to apply for accreditation. END SUMMARY.

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Severe Shortcomings In Electoral Preparations  
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[1](#)2. (C) The opposition and civil society groups have expressed concern that the voter rolls were in "shambles." To date, Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network (ZESN), an independent local NGO, and the opposition parties have been unable to secure a complete and useable electronic copy of the voters

roll to conduct an audit as allowed by the Electoral Act. ZESN Director Rindai Chipfunde-Vava told us that a limited analysis of the voter rolls for a few areas shows duplicate names and names of voters that do not live in the area. Tsvangirai MDC formation Secretary of Elections Ian Makone

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told us that he purchased a copy of the voter rolls for his constituency and was given an electronic copy of scanned images of the paper version. (NOTE: Although a complete audit is impossible, the USG through NDI is conducting analysis of the voters roll; results will be reported when available. END NOTE.)

13. (U) ZESN has repeatedly complained to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), the government body responsible for conducting elections, that the government's voter registration and education efforts have been inadequate. ZESN claimed that mobile voter registration activities were not well publicized or widespread. Opposition officials have complained that documentation requirements for voter registration were obstructive and meant to disenfranchise opposition voters. For instance, urban citizens required proof of residence such as a deed title or a letter from a landlord. Many poor urban citizens do not own homes, and getting a letter from a landlord was often difficult. Rural citizens required a letter from the village headman, which was routinely denied to suspected opposition supporters. There also have been numerous reports that citizens who have voted in past elections discovered their names had been deleted from the voter rolls. As such, they were forced to re-register, and in many cases, were not provided a receipt as proof of registration (reftel A).

14. (C) As for the process of voting, ZESN pointed out that a  
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shortage of polling stations in urban areas disadvantaged opposition voters. Harare, an opposition stronghold, has 379 polling stations for over 766,000 registered voters. According to ZESN's calculations, the average voter in Harare, who like voters throughout the country will have four ballots to contend with, will have 22 seconds to vote if all expected voters are attended to. Cities like Mutare, Bulawayo, and Gweru similarly have an inadequate number of polling stations. By contrast, Mashonaland West, a ruling party strong-hold, has 1,100 polling stations for 582,989 registered voters. In response, the Tsvangirai MDC formation has asked the High Court to order ZEC to add more polling stations in the urban areas to ensure that all voters have a responsible opportunity to vote; there has been no response to date.

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Lack Of Voter Education  
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15. (U) In early February, despite not offering its own voter education program sufficient to address the massive electoral undertaking of holding four elections simultaneously, the ZEC ordered ZESN to cease conducting voter education activities until the group had sought and received permission. Until that point, ZESN had deployed teams throughout the country to conduct voter education and had found that many citizens were not well-informed about voter registration procedures, the boundaries of new constituencies, and the manner in which the harmonized elections would be conducted. ZESN also noted discrepancies and errors in information ZEC had distributed. For instance, a ZEC brochure distributed in the Norton area of Mashonaland West province incorrectly stated that proof of residence would be required to vote on Election Day. After ZESN complained, the ZEC apparently stopped distributing the brochure.

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Media Access Limited

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¶16. (U) Although the Electoral Act provides that all political parties should have equal access to public media, several independent NGOs have reported that the state media demonstrated partisan tendencies in its coverage of the elections. The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe (MMPZ) reported that during the month of February the state television station ZTV afforded during its main news bulletins a total of 202 minutes to ZANU-PF electoral preparations, 26 minutes to Independent presidential candidate Simba Makoni, and only nine minutes to the two MDC formations. During this same period, ZTV aired 93 reports about ZANU-PF (86 positive, seven neutral, and zero negative), 15 reports about Makoni (five neutral and 10 negative), and four reports about the MDC formations (one positive, one negative, and two neutral). The state radio stations aired 118 stories about ZANU-PF (117 positive and one neutral), and five reports about the MDC formations (one positive, two neutral, and two negative). The main state-run newspaper The Herald published 54 stories about ZANU-PF (all positive), 24 stories about the MDC formations (12 neutral and 12 negative), and 19 stories about Makoni (all negative).

¶17. (U) Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) released a press statement on March 4 noting trepidation over the state media's biased reporting. Over the month of February, ZLHR noted, the ZBC has shown "dissatisfactory and unlawful" bias in favor of the ruling party candidates and activities. For example, the ZBC carried a live broadcast of ZANU-PF's launch

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of its manifesto on March 29, but did not do the same for the MDC formations or Independent presidential hopeful Simba Makoni. In another instance, a ZBC news report informed its audience in Masvingo province where to find transport that would bring them to Harare for a ZANU-PF event. In news bulletins, ruling party candidates were shown and named, while opposition candidates in the same constituencies were not mentioned. In many cases, ZLHR noted that the little coverage given to the other parties was opinionated and negative, and was meant to present them as disjointed.

¶18. (U) Another restriction on the media has been the inability of independent journalists to acquire accreditation. The Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) - Zimbabwe reported that the ZEC had refused to accredit any journalists to cover the elections unless they had been already accredited by the state-controlled Media and Information Commission (MIC). However, the MIC ceased to exist when the amended Access to Information and Protection of Privacy ACT (AIPPA) was signed into law on January 11, and its functions will not be assumed by the yet-to-be created Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) until after the elections. It therefore appears that foreign journalists who cover the election will have to enter the country as tourists, without accreditation as journalists, and will be precluded from attending "public events."

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A Hostile Political Climate...  
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¶19. (C) While wholesale violence may be down; the opposition formations reported that arrests, abductions, beatings, and intimidation were on the rise. The Tsvangirai MDC formation provided us a list of over 100 arrests and assaults of its candidates and supporters since the beginning of February. Most incidents involved campaign workers being arrested for allegedly tearing down ZANU-PF campaign posters, creating a public nuisance by "toyi-toying" (dancing and singing) while handing out flyers, and holding "illegal" meetings. Mutambara MDC formation MP Job Sikhala told us that police in the St. Mary's constituency in Chitungwiza, a high-density suburb of Harare, were arresting opposition supporters from both formations for the slightest infraction as a form of

harassment. In most cases, the arrestees paid a fine and were released.

¶10. (C) According to Reverend Ray Motsi, head of the National Pastors' Conference (NPC) and member of Christian Alliance, violence has been taking place more on an individual basis/ local level rather than as a "directed" campaign. He added that violence and intimidation were now so institutionalized that police and youth groups did not need direct orders from above to know that beating up one person strikes fear in many.

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...But With Increasing Political Space  
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¶11. (C) MDC leader and presidential candidate Morgan Tsvangirai told us that there had been some opening of

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political space for campaigning since the beginning of the year. He noted that his formation has held several large, well-attended rallies without incident. For instance, the Tsvangirai MDC formation campaign launch in Mutare on

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February 23 was attended by over 20,000 people and a campaign rally in Bulawayo on March 8 was attended by an estimated 20 - 25,000 supporters. Embassy officers on pre-election trips

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in Mashonaland provinces, traditional ZANU-PF territory, were told by MDC candidates they have been able to hold rallies and campaign. For example, on a pre-election assessment trip to Mt. Darwin, a ruling party strong-hold and home to vice president Joyce Mujuru, EconOff observed MDC campaign posters throughout the area. MDC candidates from both formations said that there had been less violence and intimidation than in past elections.

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And Also On The Positive Side  
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¶12. (U) Although the government refused to invite independent international observers, ZESN learned on March 13 that the Ministry of Justice had invited it to submit requests for accreditation for almost 12,000 observers. These observers will include such groups as the Christian Alliance and ZLHR. With 8,200 polling stations, ZESN should be able to be an effective presence throughout the country.

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Voter Manipulation And Pressure  
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¶13. (U) There have been widespread reports that the ruling party, through control over the state apparatus, has been attempting to buy the support of security forces, civil servants, traditional leaders, and rural voters with handouts of money and goods. In order to pay for this largess, the government has been printing money non-stop and further fueling runaway inflation (reftel B). In February, for example, security forces reportedly received a surprise pay raise of between ZW\$1 - ZW\$3 billion (about US\$50 - US\$150 at the parallel market rate at the time) depending on rank in their bank accounts. On February 29, teachers, upset that they had not received their entire negotiated retention bonus and pay raise, went on strike throughout the country. In the week that followed, the rest of the civil servants threatened to strike for better pay as well. On March 12, facing a complete shut down of government two weeks before the elections, the government relented and announced a large raise for civil servants. Teachers' salaries reportedly increased by a factor of 10.

¶14. (C) As during past elections, there have been numerous reports that the government has tried to limit food aid and other assistance to those with ZANU-PF party cards and to deny assistance to suspected opposition supporters. Jestina Mukoko, director of Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP), told us that access to the Grain Marketing Board (GMB), the state-run monopoly for mealie meal and grain distribution, was reserved for ZANU-PF members. She said that ZANU-PF candidates and traditional leaders were the only ones permitted to buy GMB food, which they later distributed/sold to ZANU-PF supporters at the ward level.

¶15. (C) There also have been reports that the ruling party is once again pressuring traditional leaders throughout the country to deliver support on Election Day. George Feza, an election observer for ZESN told us that chiefs around the Kadoma area of Mashonaland West province had received new vehicles, farm machinery, and fuel from the government. In exchange, they were expected to register all their constituents to vote and to ensure they voted for the ruling party. Tsvangirai MDC formation MP Amos Chibaya told us that the chiefs in his constituency of Vungu in Midlands province had told village headmen that they must bring their subjects to polling stations at certain times to vote.

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COMMENT  
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¶16. (C) The outcome of the March 29 elections will be influenced by actions carried out well in advance, such as registration obstruction, tinkering with the voters roll, intimidation, and manipulation through handouts. Moreover, the GOZ, through control of the ZEC and its country-wide network, maintains capacity to creatively alter vote totals after voting is complete. But there are some silver linings. Simba Makoni's candidacy has increased the strength of the opposition by tapping into disaffected ZANU-PF supporters. The presence of Makoni supporters in the ZEC and ZANU-PF party structures throughout the country will make rigging for Mugabe more difficult. Finally, although the presence of independent international observers would have been highly desirable, ZESN apparently will have observers at most, if not all, polling stations throughout the country. These factors will not necessarily prevent Mugabe from stealing the election, but they will make it more difficult for "friendly observers" like the SADC observation mission to ignore large scale rigging. END COMMENT.

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